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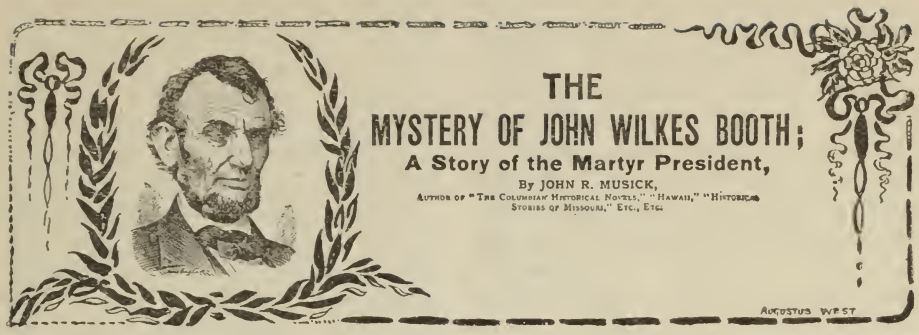
THE
MYSTERY OF JOHN WILKES BOOTH;
A Story of the Martyr President,
By JOHN R. MUSICK,
Author of "The Columbian Historical Novels," "Hawaii," "Historical Stories of Missouri," Etc., Etc.
AUGUSTUS WPST

CHAPTER XVII.

The Fugitive.

As soon as evening approached, Booth and Harold slipped their horses from the stable, mounted and rode away in the direction of Allens Fresh.

Below Evanstown run certain deep and slimy swamps, along the belt of which they were slowly and carefully picking their way as well as the darkness of night would permit, when they suddenly espied the form of a man coming toward them. Harold, who had grown a little nervous, started slightly until he saw that the individual approaching was one of the negroes whose obtuse minds, though possessing a low cunning, would be too blunt for the detection of guilt. Booth, who now took the lead in all things, called out to the negro and asked:

"Hello, my man, what are you doing in the edge of this swamp?"

"Why, massa, I'm got some traps for muskrat an' orters in de swamps, an' jist been look 'im over afore night comes on, an' I got cotched in de dark."

"What is your name?"

"Swan; I'm Job Swan."

"Do you live around in this part of the neighborhood?"

"Yes, massa, I live 'bout a mile away."

"Do you know the way to Allens Fresh?"

"I know ebry foot ob de road, massa. I've been huntin' an' trappin' in dis swamp most all my life when I ain't raisin' terbacker."

"How much will you charge to show us the road that goes to Allens Fresh?" asked Booth.

The negro scratched his head in a thoughtful manner, as he tried to make a mental settlement on the perplexing question.

"Wall, ye see, boss, it's a right smart piece, I want t' tell ye, an' I promised my old woman I'd be home." This was a lie, for Swan had no wife, and the distance to the road was not a mile.

"Will you show the road to us for two dollars?"

The cunning negro, who had been puzzling his brain whether it would be better to ask fifty or seventy-five cents, started slightly at this stupendous offer, and though feeling he had struck it rich, determined to play for as high a stake as possible.

"Wall, you see, massa, my ole woman tole me t' come home."

"You can make two dollars in a short time," returned Booth.

"Wall, it's mighty little"——

"There may be more when the road is discovered," said Booth.

This last remark closed the bargain and the negro told them to follow him.

The swamps tributary to the various

branches of the Wicomico River, of which the chief feeder is Allens Creek, bear various names, such as Jordan's Swamp, Atchell's Swamp, and Scrub Swamp. There are dense growths of dogwood, gum, and beech, planted in sluices of water and bog, and their width varies from half a mile to four miles, while their length is over sixteen miles. Frequent deep ponds dot this wilderness place, with here and there a stretch of dry soil, but no human being inhabits the malarious extent; even one hunted by human bloodhounds would shrink from hiding there. Serpents and slimy lizards make this unlovely region their home. Sometimes a fugitive coon takes refuge in the marsh and wilderness from the hounds, while in the soft mud a thousand odorous muskrats dwell, with now and then a tremulous otter. Long ago in the ante-bellum days the hunted negro, fleeing from his master and crime, dared not fathom the treacherous clay, nor make himself a fellow companion of the slimy reptiles in this olitude.

When the water was low the marsh with its extended dreariness was potent. Its spongy, low-lying surface, sluggish, inky pools, and tortuous sloughs, winding their slimy way, serpent-like, toward the river, were unpleasant sights; equally dispiriting were the greenish gray tussocks, with their scout blades, their amphibious flavor, and unpleasant dampness. The vocal expression of the swamp was melancholy and depressing. The sepulchral loom of the bittern, the shriek of the curlew, the scream of the passing brent, the wrangling of quarrelsome teal, the sharp, querulous protest of the startled crane, and the syllabled complaint of the "killdeer" plover were not calculated to rouse the spirits of the fugitive, treading the path through this gloomy region over which the darkness was falling. Nor was the aspect of these mournful fowl calculated to enliven the conscience-stricken fugitives. Certainly not the blue heron standing mid-leg deep in water, obviously catching cold in a reckless disregard of wet feet and consequence; nor the mournful curlew, the dejected plover, or the low-spirited snipe, who saw fit to join him in his suicidal contemplation; nor the impassive kingfisher—or ornithological Marius—reviewing the desolate expense; nor the black raven, which silently winged its way to and fro across the marsh, evidently unable to decide whether the waters had subsided or not, and evidently feeling so low-spirited in the reflection that after all his trouble, he wouldn't be able to give a definite answer. On the contrary, it was evident at a glance that the dreary expanse of the combination of marshes told unpleasantly on the birds and that the season of migration was looked forward to with a feeling of relief and satisfaction.

Along the narrow spongy road wending its serpentine course through the swamp in and out, here and there, Booth and Harold followed their guide. The damp air blew over the cold, glittering expense, and chilled the frames of the horsemen. Their slow and melancholy journey was more agonizing than the keenest suffering or dread. The steel-like glint mocked the low hollows and the sinuous line of slough, while the great shell-incrusted trunks of fallen trees arose, and went forth on their dreary, purposeless wanderings, drifting hither and thither, but getting no farther toward any goal at the falling of the streams or the day's decline than the cursed Hebrew in the legend. The wild ducks swam silently, making neither ripple nor furrow on the shimmering surface, while the fog came in with the wind and shut out

the blue above, even as the green below had been obliterated, and the horsemen, lost in that fog, followed Swan in a hopeless way, starting at what seemed the brushing of fingers against their horses or shrank from the tufts of grass spreading around like the floating hair of a corpse. Harold's teeth were chattering with cold and nameless dread, while Booth shuddered as his horse splashed on through the miry soil. He suggested that before they crossed the river they might find some place where they could stay over night.

After learning that the road led through swamps dangerous to one not acquainted in the locality, they agreed to give the negro five dollars more to guide them to Allens Fresh. Passing through the swamp they once more reached an elevated portion of the country and came in view of a large, elegant dwelling-house, one of the finest in Maryland.

"Who lives there?" asked Booth.

"Mr. Sam Coxe—he's a rebel," growled the negro, with an oath.

"We do not care what he is, we must stop with him and get refreshments, if such a thing is possible. Will you wait for us?"

"Dunno, boss; my ole woman"——

"I will make it five dollars more," said Booth. The additional five dollars decided the darkey to endure the wrath of his "old woman." Harold said he knew Mr. Coxe. Though the reporters for the papers at the time stated that Booth was familiar with Coxe, it was false. He was a total stranger in the rural districts. Having spent all his life in the cities, or traveling constantly, as every actor must, it was highly improbable that he should know many people in the interior.

Harold hallooed. A dog barked.

"Hallo!" called Harold again. Two dogs barked, and still there was no evidence of life within. The whole house seemed buried in slumber.

"They sleep as if they were dead!" growled Harold.

"Someone is surely at home," said Booth. The negro sat on the stiles and watched the two men he had been guiding, his form dimly outlined in the starlight.

"What shall we do?" asked Harold.

"Call again."

"Hallo-oo-oo!" yelled Harold, louder than before. At this time a whole kennel of dogs seemed to have been roused by the shouting and came yelping toward the fence. Still there was no sign of a light in any part of the house. Harold was growing impatient. Booth changed his position in the saddle, so as to relieve his aching limb, and the negro on the stiles took a faded red handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"We must rouse them," said Booth. "I am faint, and must have some food and drink."

"Get down, go to the door and pound on it until you rouse somebody."

Harold alighted and making his horse fast to the fence went over the stiles and by coaxing, threatening, and the aid of his clubbed carbine managed to make a truce with the canines whereby he was permitted to go to the house. It was one of those old-fashioned Virginia houses with a piazza in front, extending the full length of the building. When Harold had gained the piazza there was no more sign of life in the house than before. He rapped with his knuckles and received no answer. He rapped again and still all was silence.

"D—n you, I'll wake you if you are alive!" he cried, and beat the door furiously with the butt of his gun; then he waited for a few moments and heard someone stirring within the building

A few moments later a voice from within asked:

"Who is there?"

"It's a friend," Harold answered, little dreaming that the question and answer would afterward prove the ruin of Mr. Coxe. The negro heard the question and answer and afterward when insane officials were foolishly accusing everyone possible of being an accomplice in Lincoln's assassination, a big reward stimulated the cunning scoundrel's memory and he hastened to inform on Mr. Coxe.

On hearing Harold speak the man opened the door and said:

"If you are my friend you surely are not afraid to tell me what your name is."

"No; I am Dave Harold," he answered, in a low tone which reached the negro's ears.

"Dave, is it you? Where are you going?"

"We are trying to get to Johnson's army," Harold answered.

"You are foolish. The bottom has fallen out of the whole thing; and the Confederates coming in and surrendering by the thousands," said Mr. Coxe.

"Well, we are going to leave the country. We have to do so, and we need food and to rest."

"Who is with you?"

"Mr. John Wilkes Booth." Mr. Coxe at this time did not know Booth, nor had he heard of the assassination. In fact, living off the telegraph line, and keeping close at home, it is not to be wondered that he had not heard of the fearful affair. "Booth had his leg broken, and must rest. The Feds will capture him and hang him for a spy if he don't get out of the country."

"Why not surrender. I think there will be no fear of their harming him."

"His case is different," urged Harold, for he realized Mr. Coxe knew nothing of the assassination. "He must not be captured, at least not now."

"Well, well, bring him in. I don't like this business, but I suppose it is all right, Dave. I hope you won't get me into any trouble."

Harold went back to Booth and said:

"Come on, do you want me to help you down?"

"Yes; I am infernally sore. I believe my leg is worse swollen than ever."

He helped him to alight and with his rude crutches under his arms, Booth walked slowly to the house.

"Must I stay here?" asked the negro.

"Yes," Booth returned.

"Geminy, you is lame, master," the negro said.

"Yes, my horse fell."

The negro braced his back against the top step of the style and fixed his eyes on the house, with a suspicious look.

"Bet um rebels; know dat ole master Coxe am. Wush some o' Mr. Linkum's soldiers 'd come 'long now an' gobble 'em up."

Mr. Coxe hurried the men into the house and said:

"I do not like this. I don't understand why you call me out at such an unseasonable hour?" For fear Booth would say something that might spoil all, Harold interposed:

"I am sorry we had to do so, Mr. Coxe. I am very sorry, but Mr. Booth is suffering from his leg and wants to rest a few moments."

"Where are you going then?"

"We are going to cross the Potomac; but we are hungry."

"I cannot furnish Confederates or men going to the Confederate army with food," Mr. Coxe declared.

"Then we will force you to give it to us. We will take it."

At this moment Mrs. Coxe came

downstairs, hastily dressed, and asked:

"What is the trouble?"

"Two starving, tired men, one of whom is wounded, want something to eat," said Booth. The pathetic tones of the tragedian made an impression on the woman, and she returned:

"True, we are under bond not to feed a Confederate, but if you take from us what is on the table we can't help ourselves."

"That is it!" laughed Harold. "Set it out and we will take it."

She raked some coals together on the great kitchen hearth, set the tea-kettle to singing and soon had supper spread on the table. They sat at the table, and the negro, inspired by the low cunning of his race, crept around to the window and glared in at them.

"Dis Master Coxe feedin' um," he growled. "Dey am secesh, dat's sartin. Now I'm gwine t' tell de fust sojers I see, Coxe am a feedin' secesh."

It was four o'clock when Booth and Harold came from the house.

"You are a coward," cried Harold angrily. "You won't let us stay until morning."

"These are troublesome times," said Mr. Coxe.

"Nevertheless, you need not be so sparing of your hospitality," Booth declared as he hobbled on his crutch toward his horse.

"I hope you will not bother me again," said Mr. Coxe. "I have had enough trouble without incurring more. If you return I will send for an officer and have you both arrested on suspicion."

Booth stopped short and Harold swore.

"Let's shoot him and burn his house," the youth said.

"No, come on, we have no time."

They mounted and left with the negro guide leading them. He conducted them three miles further and Harold then said:

"We can now find the way and will discharge you."

"Here is five dollars more," put in Booth, handing him the money. "Now you can go home, and give your wife a present to keep her from pulling the wool out of your head."

"Thank ye, massa—thank ye, Oh I'll always be glad ter sarve ye. Good mawnin', master," and doffing his hat he began to retrace his steps. It was not yet daylight though the East was once more growing rosy with approaching dawn. Booth shivered with the cold, until his teeth chattered.

"Harold, I don't like that nigger. He has a treacherous look about him."

"Perhaps I had better follow him into the swamps and shoot him down."

"No, no, I will consent to no bloodshed save in defence of life."

In the dark gray of early dawn they rode over an eminince and came in view of the Potomac. Booth's eagle eye was quick to detect moving objects in the distance, and he said:

"Stop, Harold."

"What do you see?"

"Cavalry."

"God in Heaven, are we trapped?" gasped Harold.

"It has that appearance. Look down the Potomac and tell me if you do not see cavalrymen."

"I do!" he answered. "Mr. Booth, what must we do?"

"Harold, are you afraid to die?" asked Booth in a deep, solemn tone, emphasizing the awful seriousness of the theme suggested by the sentence.

"I don't want to die, I am not prepared to die," was the answer.

"Well, we must al die sometime. When ever stern fate calls for your life yield it as a brave man and not a coward."

"Maybe, they would not kill us."

"Perhaps not shoot us on sight, but drag us into an accursed court, torture us for weeks, and end in hanging us at some damnable public exhibition. Now, if we are surrounded, I will die rather than surrender, and you are a fool if you don't do the same."

"They have not seen us yet."

"No."

"Can't we retreat?"

"Yes, we can go back to the swamp and stay there until night, and then move on the Potomac again. We must get over it some way."

Day had begun to dawn as they rode down the hill toward Mr. Coxe's house, and the negro seeing them returning started the report that they spent from Sunday to Thursday there.

Booth and Harold were confident they had not been discovered and returned leisurely to the lower lands which were covered with a forest that would conceal them from the enemy. Though it was April, the nights were still exceedingly cold, and they suffered greatly.

They entered the wood and remained concealed during the day. Harold from his post of observation in the bushy branches of large tree reported bodies of horsemen scouring the country, and there was little doubt that the river was carefully guarded.

"We can't cross with our horses!" he said.

"That's evident," returned Booth, who reclined at the root of a tree.

The sun was shining brightly, and as it arose higher in the heavens it grew warmer.

"What shall we do with them?"

"It is my opinion that we will never be able to take them from this wood. We must cross the river in a skiff, then make our way across the country until by some means we reach the Confederate lines."

"If we had our horses on the other side they might be of some advantage to us."

"Certainly. It is barely possible they might swim after us, if we can find a skiff. We can't move anywhere to-day; I propose we stay in the good greenwood."

"What shall we do for something to eat?"

"Can't you forage?"

"I can go and get something, I suppose; but it will be at a great risk."

"Be careful, mount your horse and go to some good old Marylander and tell him what you want. You will be accommodated. Here is money to buy it. Perhaps you can gain some information."

Booth had removed the saddle from the back of his tired steed and tied the animal at a spot where there was a large quantity of fresh green buds, and some grass had made an early start, that the poor beast might partially satisfy his hunger.

Harold with his carbine slung at his saddle bow rode away to procure something for himself and companion. Booth cautioned him as he went to keep a careful lookout for enemies, which he promised to do.

Left alone, the homicide stretched himself on the dry leaves in a spot where the genial warmth of the sun beamed upon him, and for the first time began to calmly reflect on what he had done and what the future had in store for him. He no longer saw the woman who had lured him to ruin in the light of an angel of fascination, but a devil, a siren to lure men to death. He wondered, now that he was wholly from under her influence, how he was ever so duped, and cursed the day he saw her.

What reason had he to take up this quarrel just when the Confederacy was tumbling to pieces like a house of sand. It had never been his quarrel. He had

been loyal to the Union and always looked on Lincoln as one of the greatest and best men that lived.

But the deed was done and retraction impossible. He was hunted by ten thousand human bloodhounds, eager for his blood, and they made him savage. They would kill him if they could, so he determined to die fighting. He tried to convince himself that after all there was a spark of patriotism in his soul, and that he had done the deed to avenge the South. He was a Southerner by birth, and though he had been loyal to the Union, his generous sense of right led him to believe that the wrongs of the South had but just begun. Their punishment for secession must not end until they were completely humiliated and crushed by the iron heel of oppression.

Reason again came to torture him. The martyred President was a Southerner by birth and would have been their best friend. His taking off would no doubt double the suffering of the defeated Confederates. Lincoln was strong, at the head of a new and ambitious party. He would have guided it with a firm hand and restrained the oppressors.

Harold did not return, and as the hours wore on and the sun began to descend, Booth grew uneasy. Then the sun set and night came. It was cold; oh, so cold! Harold still came not, and he began to fear he was captured. He shuddered as the awful horrors of his situation burst upon him.

The night grew darker, and the cold more intense. He walked up and down the wood on his crutch to keep from freezing.

During that night he suffered the torments of the damned. His broken limb and shivering body made his agony the keenest, while suspense and even fear added to remorse drove him nearly insane.

It must have been nearly midnight when he heard the tramping of horses' feet and clanking of arms. He arose and drew a pistol, determined to die fighting. Death by the bullet was a mercy in comparison with the tortures he suffered. But the horsemen went by and he was left alone in darkness and despair. He went to his horse and stood near him in order to get some warmth from his body.

But all things must have an end, and so did this night. Day dawned, and a more miserable being than John Wilkes Booth could hardly have been found. His worst enemy would have pitied him then. He mounted his horse with great difficulty, and started to find Harold. Riding out to a point of land from which he could overlook the valley and swamps below, he swept the whole surrounding country. Here and there were squads of blue-coated cavalry dashing along, but no sign of Harold could be seen.

He rode back to the same wooded ridges, where he would be concealed. The sun came out, and once more he was warmed, and began to feel the terrible pangs of hunger, with no means of appeasing it. The young grass and buds afforded some food for his horse, but not nearly enough to supply its wants. Horse and rider were starving.

His agony in that forest will never be known. During the afternoon the sky became overcast with cold gray clouds, a keen wind swept down from the north which seemed to pierce the fugitive to the bone. His head ached from cold and nervous strain. Oh, how he longed for one hour's repose stretched upon a bed of slumber, with a sense of security; but that was never to be.

A party of cavalry scouting in the wood passed very near to him, and once he thought he was discovered.

The soldiery were down among the swamps and marshes, through which they had crossed the night before, searching every bog and bayou in vain for the fugitive. He retired further up the bluff, where, among rocks and cedars, he tried to conceal himself from those human bloodhounds. When night came his agony grew unbearable, and he was nearly mad with suffering.

In his frenzy he slew his horse, and then crept in between the forelegs of the animal to get some warmth from its body, but that body grew colder and colder, until it gave out the icy touch of death instead of the warmth of life. Still he lay clinging to the frozen beast, freezing and dying in darkness, agony, horror and despair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Arrest of George and Flight of Bessie.

As the novel writers say, we will now return and bring up other threads of our story. We left Claude on the night of the assassination, struggling through the throng with the insensible Bessie Odell in his arms. The brutal cavalrymen, reckless of human life, dashed into the crowd, scattering them right and left, and one horse struck Claude's shoulder with his hoof as he leaped over him. The young soldier had presence of mind enough to crouch to the ground, covering his precious burden with his body while the trooper leaped his steed over his head.

Struggling to his feet, he bore the insensible Bessie to the sidewalk and then began fighting his way through the throng until he came to a less crowded street. His shoulder and hip were slightly bruised and gave him some pain, but he was not disabled, and with the precious burden in his arms he struggled on and on, murmuring a prayer to heaven for help.

At last he came to a door-step, on which he sank, holding Bessie in his arms, pressing his lips to her white face and begging her in endearing terms to speak. The street was almost deserted. A pretty young woman, dressed in the short skirts of a singing and dancing soubrette, her hair puffed, curled and powdered, and face made up for a footlight angel, ran down the street crying:

"My God, what is all this hubbub about? What has happened? Are the rebels taking the city?"

She espied the man sitting on the stoop of the dark house, and running to him, asked:

"What has happened? Is the young woman killed?"

Claude glanced at her and said:

"Rose Palmer, I am glad to see you."

"Why, it's Captain Mitchell! Say, Cap, what's up, any way? Are the people all going crazy? Our show broke up, everybody ran off just as I was doin' my new jig. Is everybody crazy, or am I drunk?"

"Rose, Mr. Lincoln has been shot, and I am afraid killed!"

"Lincoln—the president?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"I will explain all to you in time. Now, Rose, I know I can depened on you, and that you will help one in this dark hour."

"Oh land sakes, yes. If I can do anyone a good turn I'm in for it. What do ye want?"

"Take us to your house. This young lady must stay there for the present."

"My home? Why, she's a fine lady, and my poor home ain't no place for her!"

"Necessity makes no distinction, Rose. Come, like a good girl, lead the way. We may all be lost if you delay."

"Come on," she said, and consider-

ably bewildered, led the way to her poor house. Rose for the last three days had been quite alone, the other three girls who had occupied apartments in the lodging house having left the city. She opened the front door with a key, and Claude, looking up and down the street to see that they were not observed, hastened in with his burden and laid Bessie down upon an old sofa in the hall.

"Lock the door!" he gasped.

She did so, and facing about, looked at him and asked:

"Now, Cap, what in the dickens and Tom Walker does all this mean?"

"Rose, I am going to entrust my life in your hands. Prove my friend and I will reward you. Lincoln was killed in the theater, and the people are insane. Hundreds and thousands of innocent people will suffer for the deed!"

"Who killed him?" asked Rose.

"John Wilkes Booth. He was seen at Mrs. Surratt's house, and may have boarded there; at least he was seen there."

"What have they done with Booth?"

"I think he escaped!"

"Well, what has all that to do with your bringing this pretty thing here?" asked Rose, taking a bottle of smelling salts from the mantel and holding it close to the face of Bessie, who began to recover from her long swoon.

"Rose, everyone at the Surratt house will be charged with being an accomplice in the crime. Bessie Odell and her brother were seen talking with Booth this very day. Oh, Rose, if you don't save her she is lost—and I—"

"I will save her!" Rose declared. "The crazy lunatics shan't touch her. Just look how sweet and pretty she is. Oh, won't you open those pretty eyes and look at me?" Rose murmured, as the eyelids of the unconscious girl began to tremble.

She recovered quickly, and after the first bewilderment at finding herself in a strange place, sat up and asked Claude, who was bending over her, how they came there. He explained, and Rose called her a dear good creature and begged her not to worry herself, as she would see that no harm befell her.

Poor Bessie! She covered her eyes to shut the horrible events of the evening from her sight, but only made them more visible. When she was sufficiently recovered, Claude sat by her side, and they earnestly discussed the situation.

"The populace will be so enraged," he said, "their actions will be controlled by passion rather than reason. Even my tender and innocent Bessie may be accused, so you must be content to stay here until better arrangements can be made."

"And I will see that no harm comes to you, little one," said Rose. "I will look after you just as your own mother would."

"What will become of poor George?" Bessie asked, tears starting afresh from her eyes.

"I will do all I can for him," Claude answered. "You could do nothing and would make his case worse. If he has fled and will keep out of the way until this blows over, all will be well. If not, I will do what I can, and hope to save him. Stay here now and pray for all of us."

"Yes, and I'll help you, though I never prayed a lick in my life," sobbed Rose.

Claude took his departure, taking care to see he was not observed by anyone on the streets. He made his way to the Willard Hotel, which he found like a seething cauldron of excitement. He went quickly to his room and changed his citizens' clothes for his captain's uniform, not prompted by vanity, but to impress his loyalty

on the mob. He threw himself on the bed and tried to sleep, but it was impossible. Few slept in Washington that night. Every few minutes troops of cavalry went thundering by, and the rumble of artillery shook the streets.

Day dawned at last. What a different scene did the bright-faced sun look upon from the preceding. Then all was joy, and the white wings of peace had appeared on the horizon. Now all was dark, and misery stalked forth again with grim threatenings of war. There are many who wonder how they ever lived through that night; it was the *Noche triste* of Washington.

Claude, by a prodigious effort, became more calm, and went to breakfast at eight. While at the table a colored waiter brought him a sealed letter. He opened it and read:

"April 15, 1865.

"Military Prison, midnight.

"Captain Mitchell: I was arrested at eleven o'clock last night and thrown in prison on some charge of which I am both innocent and ignorant. Where is my sister? Will you protect her?"

"George Odell."

Though Claude had expected this, and was partially prepared for it, nevertheless the blow fell so heavily he reeled beneath it.

"What shall I do for poor George?" he asked himself. "He may be hung, for the people are insane!"

He remembered having seen Booth, George and Bessie conversing on the street corner. This fact was no doubt known to the authorities, and they would both be deemed accessories.

Claude rose, went to his room, and threw himself in a chair to consider what should be done. He thought out many plans, but abandoned all as impracticable, until he finally remembered General Grant, on whom he had made a favorable impression at Appomattox.

He hastened to his headquarters, and after considerable delay was admitted. He found him seated at a table covered with papers and maps. He looked up at his entrance and said:

"Good morning, Captain, what can I do for you?"

"General, I have a friend in trouble."

"Who is it?"

"Captain George Odell, who was captured at Richmond." Then he proceeded to tell him how he had first met him, and of the intimacy that had grown up between them. He concluded by telling how he had been arrested for complicity in the conspiracy to assassinate the president."

General Grant smoked his cigar for several moments in silence, then said:

"I don't really see how I can aid you, young man. The matter is not in my hands."

"Is not the city under martial law?"

"True, but General Hancock is at the head of it. I am of the opinion it will be useless to expect the release of your friend at present, though you might call at General Hancock's headquarters. He will be impartially tried, I suppose."

Claude, with the weight on his heart greatly increased, hurried to the headquarters of General Hancock. He found that person as impervious as stone.

"I cannot consent to the release of my prisoner until fully satisfied of his innocence," said the general.

"General, I am quite sure from the list of persons reported, you have many innocent people in prison."

"Perhaps we have," he answered, "but we dare not release them for fear some guilty person may escape. After the excitement is over we shall begin to sift matters some, and learn who are the guilty and who the innocent."

Claude left General Hancock with a

still heavier weight on his heart. He went back to the Willard Hotel, reaching it in the evening. A newsboy crying his papers, at the same time shouting "More conspirators discovered!" attracted his attention. He bought a copy and ran his eyes over the columns.

"BOOTH'S FRIENDS IN THE CITY. SOME ARRESTED, AND OTHERS SHADOWED!"

With the pertinacity, egotism and utter disregard for truth characteristic of sensational reporters, it boldly declared that Booth was no doubt hiding somewhere in the city. The opinion of Generals Grant and Hancock were that he could not possibly have escaped. A long list of arrests were given, the last name of which was George Odell, and a Confederate officer who had been captured at Lee's surrender.

The reporter, having the pedantic desire to display his shrewdness more than any regard for truth, declared there was no possible doubt of George Odell's guilt. It contained the following:

"Odell and his sister Bessie came here from Richmond after its capture, without any plausible excuse whatever. Only the day before the assassination they were seen talking with the actor, John Wilkes Booth, the man who assassinated the president. George is now in jail, but his sister Bessie has disappeared. There is no doubt that she and Booth are in hiding together. They are lovers and have long been regarded by decent stage people as disreputable characters, and a disgrace to the profession!"

Claude started to his feet black with rage. His first inclination was to go and cram the contemptible lie down the rascal's throat. But on second thought he knew it would be folly, and would ruin the chances of his friends. He carried the paper to his room and locking himself in, sat down to finish the column. It continued:

"Bessie Odell is supposed to be in hiding in the house of an actress in this city. All people connected with Ford's theater or any of the other houses of amusement are to be placed under surveillance at once, and every place thoroughly searched for the missing woman—"

The police, detectives and reporters had confused Bessie with Sybil, a fact which Claude did not realize.

"Something must be done this very night. I must get Bessie out of the city!" he thought. "How am I to do it?"

At last he rose quickly, and donning his military coat and cap, buckled on his sword and left the house. He found a carriage near, and springing in, ordered the driver to take him to the office of Dr. William Evans. The doctor was an intimate friend, and a man on whom he could depend in the emergency. He told him that he would call upon him with two ladies whom he wished to assist in getting safely from the city.

The doctor at first smiled at the thought of any lady being in danger from the military, police or mob, but a few words from Claude opened his eyes to the gravity of the situation. He promised at the risk of his life to do all he could for them.

Claude then leaped into the carriage and drove to the corresponding number of the house in which Rose Palmer and Bessie were on the opposite side of the block, and told the man to wait there until he should call for him.

"Remember I am an army officer, and you must obey to the letter," he said. The driver nodded.

The people had already begun to throng the streets, and detectives were searching several houses, but by good

luck had the wrong numbers. A young army officer was seen to fly up one stoop and ring the bell. There being no immediate answer, he gave three nervous jerks and waited. The door was partially opened by Rose, who held a cocked pistol in her hand.

"Put that up, Rose, it is only I," he said. "You must get ready to leave the city!"

"Why?"

"You will go to jail if you don't. An order has been issued to arrest everyone connected in any way with the stage."

"Well that's carryin' things with a mighty high hand, I must say. I've a good mind to defy 'em!"

"An act of folly if you did. Where is Bessie?"

"Upstairs asleep, poor thing!"

"Anybody been here?"

"No one but Jack Nelson. He didn't see her, though. Jack is in the other room now waiting for his supper."

For a wonder Jack was sober. He was in his uniform, and had brought his musket with him. It was not necessary for Jack to carry his gun when going courting, but having just been relieved from duty he stopped to see Rose on his way to the barracks.

"I want you to stand guard over your sweetheart, Jack," said Claude.

"Why?"

He then explained that all people engaged in any way in the theatrical profession were to be arrested, that the house would certainly be raided and Rose carried away to jail. Jack loved Rose with all his great brave heart, and swore she should not be taken. Claude told him to take his station outside the door with his musket and inform all persons, citizens, police, detectives, soldiers and officers, that he had been placed as guard over the house, and to allow no one to enter.

"By gracious, I'll do it," Jack declared, "an' I'll jab my bayonet inter the first man as tries t' pass me!"

The ruse worked well, and they were not a moment too soon in putting it in operation. The street was now filled with a wild, uproarious crowd of people. Darkness had fallen on the city, but so many carried torches and lanterns that the streets were illuminated with the brilliance of day.

"Bring out the murderers! Hang the murderers! Don't let any escape!" roared the populace.

Bessie within heard the angry shout swelling to a mighty roar, and tremblingly clung to her lover, sobbing:

"Claude! Claude! they will murder us! They are mad! All are mad, and will commit some terrible deed!"

"Be calm, Bessie, and trust in me! I swear that while I live they shall not harm a hair of your head!"

She clung, trembling, to him, and he wound his left arm about her waist, holding his revolver in his right hand, while they listened to the vast throng surging up and down the street. Liquor had been dealt out freely and the mob made furious.

"Hang the d—d rebels! Bring 'em out, men and women, an' hang every one!" roared the mob. "Come out, old Booth, and show yerself! Bring that murderess with ye, an' we'll give ye both a dance on nothin'!"

The air was rank with profanity. The name of Bessie Odell was on the lips of the rioters, for she was supposed to be an accomplice of Booth.

"Come out, Bessie! Come out an' show yer pretty face, an' we'll spile yer beauty!"

"Bet yer life we will!" shrieked an old hag, who had the very appropriate soubriquet of "Skullson." "Come out here, ye hussy, an' let us see yer perty face!"

Like an angry sea they surged about the house, but the lusty form and

gleaming bayonet of Jack Nelson kept them at bay.

Rose Palmer was defiant, and it required all Claude's persuasions to prevent her showing herself at the window and giving them a "piece of her mind."

"Down with the actresses! Down with the stage people! Come out o' there, Bessie Odell!"

Skullson siezed a stone and hurled it with such force that it crashed through shutter and window pane. Then the old hag danced about, yelling with wild delight, her goggle eyes and disheveled hair giving her the appearance of a veritable fiend.

In the midst of the uproar without it became doubtful if the party could escape at all, and Claude proposed sending Rose, disguised as a boy, to the barracks for his company of soldiers to defend her against the mob. Bessie promptly but firmly said that not one drop of blood should be shed for her. She resolved to depart at once and make her way to Europe, if it were still possible.

By this time it was nine o'clock, and the crowd which had gathered around the house already filled the street for several blocks. The great platform erected at the open square from which to witness the grand review resembled a gigantic ship in a heavy sea. The roar of the human billows echoed through the deserted halls and apartments. Voices could be heard on the steps, but the faithful guard was holding them at bay. The lights in the front rooms were extinguished, in the hope of suggesting to the mob that the inmates had already fled. But it had no such effect, as the voices and tramp of feet came nearer and nearer —there was not a moment to lose.

Rose conducted her guest to another apartment, where she furnished her with a complete change of apparel, and proceeded to disguise both herself and Bessie. Her knowledge of the art of "making up" stood her in good stead on this occasion. In a few moments both girls looked much older than they really were, and their nearest relatives would hardly have recognized them.

To escape by the street in front was impossible, for both street and little square a block away were full of people. They were obliged to make way across the back garden and pass through a gate in the wall to an alley. A ruffian ran toward the two women with a wild yell, but quick as a flash Claude's sword flashed in the air, there was a sickening blow, and he sunk with a groan to the ground.

Bessie shuddered, and began to sob.

"Come!" whispered Claude, "we have no time to spare!"

They hurried to the gate opposite, against which Claude threw his shoulder and burst it open. Entering the rear garden of the next house he closed the gate and barred it with a heavy timber, and hurried into the rear of the house just as the mob came tramping down the alley. They paused a moment at the senseless body of the man whom Claude had struck, and then a wild storm of shrieks and yells arose on the air.

"They are murdering all Union men! Hang 'em! Hang 'em! Come out, old Booth! Bring your play actor with ye!"

Claude hurried his companions into the house, and reaching a hall, were walking rapidly through it toward the street door in front when the proprietor met him, demanding:

"Who are you, sir, and where are you going?"

"We got into the wrong house, and are making our way to the street."

"Well these are curious times, you know," said the landlord, "and we

would like to know something about you before letting you leave."

"I am an officer in the Union army," said Claude. "I have important matters to attend to; so stand aside!"

From their position they could hear the far-off roar of the angry thousands, subdued by walls and distance, yet sounding fearfully near. Claude's two companions heard it and shuddered. The landlord observed them, and said:

"No, you can't pass! I know Booth is close about, and there are two women with him! You may be he, so you'll stop!"

As he spoke the man drew an old-fashioned Colt's revolver. Claude seized his right arm with his left hand, and shortening his sword with his right pressed it against his side until the point punctured the skin and the blood trickled down his side.

"Drop that pistol or I will pin you to the wall!" The horrified man let the pistol fall, and Claude, seizing it, removed the caps and broke it over the stair rail. Then he told him if he attempted any interference, or raised the least outcry he would shoot him dead. The rascal sank into a corner of the room and began pleading for mercy.

Claude whispered to the girls to follow.

The crowd could be heard in the alley behind. To return would have been to fall into their hands. The venture must be made. Claude opened the great front door cautiously, looked out into the street, and with dismay saw an unusually large throng of people, but his carriage was not ten paces away. He would have given ten thousand dollars at that moment to have been safely inside the vehicle with his fair companions. They stepped boldly out into the street, the officer with a veiled lady on each arm. The move was bold, but it was safe.

Many curious glances were given them as they entered the carriage, but vice, and acted in a semi-military and no one dared interfere. Claude gave the driver a street and number, the driver cracked his whip, and his spirited horses started away at a brisk trot.

"Say, bet that's Booth and the actresses in disguise!" roared one of the street rowdies.

"Then ye'd orter git him, Phil! Thar's a hundred thousand in it!"

The rowdy ran after the carriage and quickly came alongside. He shouted to the driver to stop, and that person lashed him with his whip and increased his speed. The ruffian leaped upon the step of the carriage and tried to peer inside, but at this moment the butt of a revolver crashed through the glass, and striking him in the face sent him senseless and quivering to the pavement.

"Drive on!" cried Claude. "We can't stop for accidents!" At the corner he had ordered the carriage to be driven they alighted, the carriage was discharged, and they proceeded by a roundabout way to the home of Dr. Evans.

They were admitted to the doctor's waiting room, and in a few moments called into his consultation apartment. When they entered Rose closed the door and turned the key, and warned the doctor as he loved his life to make no exclamation that might be heard.

Dr. Evans was partially prepared for his visitors, and at first inclined to think their precautions unnecessary, but Claude soon convinced him of the danger. He then concealed the ladies in his house for several hours. On the next day he went out in his carriage, ostensibly to pay professional visits, as usual, in reality to make a way

for passing the barriers. He drove out of the city and was stopped by the pickets, but on assuring the outposts he was going to see a patient, and on the presentation of a passport from a provost marshal, he was permitted to go unquestioned. The doctor drove over into Virginia, where he arranged for a carriage to take two ladies to Alexandria. The carriage was to have an escort of mounted soldiers. The doctor explained that the ladies were patients of his sanitarium for treatment, one of whom had received news of her mother's illness, and was going to her.

Meanwhile Claude obtained permission to take his company of cavalry and escort a party to Alexandria. They drove out of the city under a strong guard and struck the great road to Alexandria, following the beautiful Potomac.

Alexandria was at this time a dangerous place for Bessie to remain long. By some means the officers had got one of her pictures, and her features were engraved and scattered broadcast on circulars, with those of John Wilkes Booth and others.

The carriage was discharged here, and Claude sent his company back under the lieutenant. He left the girls at the hotel.

Owing to the agitated condition of the country few boats ran on the Potomac, but fortune favored him on this occasion, and he secured passage for the ladies and himself to Norfolk. He placed the ladies on a steamer at Norfolk bound for New York, where he instructed them to go to a certain hotel, register under assumed names, and remain until he should call for them.

The parting of the lovers was quiet but affecting. They stood on the after part of the ship alone, Rose having generously gone to her stateroom to have a cry over poor Jack, whom she greatly feared would spend the remainder of his days in the guard house. When Claude took Bessie's hands in his own, and in his manly, earnest voice told her how his deep love for her had increased during all the trials through which they had gone, and that she was dearer to him than ever before, the tears coursed down her cheeks.

"I am not worth all you have suffered, Claude," she sobbed.

"We prize that which costs us most," he answered. "I thought I could never love you more than I did, but that love has increased as I discovered your anxiety for your brother exceeded fears for yourself."

"Poor George, to be in prison, and he so innocent! Oh! Claude! Claude! Will this heavy burden never be lifted from my heart, and will the mystery of this assassination never be revealed?"

For a few moments he was thoughtful before answering her double question, and then said:

"I believe the sun will soon shine again upon you, poor girl; but as to this mystery, it will take scores of years, for man's prejudices to cool sufficiently to even calmly investigate it. The truth may never be known."

"Do you believe it was a general conspiracy?"

"No. It was more likely the act of a madman, prompted by motives unknown."

At this moment the bell struck for visitors to go ashore. He caught her for a moment in his arms, pressed his lips to hers, and whispering a "God bless you!" was gone.

To be Continued.